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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
THE DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

September 28, 1964

MEMORANDUM TO: The Honorable
John A. McCone,
Director of Central Intelligence.

SUBJECT: Proposal for a SNIE on Communist Reaction to
Various US Courses of Action in Indochina

We feel that another look at the problem in light of the Tonkin Gulf incidents may allow for a firmer estimate than that contained in the May SNIE. An agreed intelligence assessment of this sort would, furthermore, now be especially timely in view of current planning. In fact, for it to be useful, we have to ask for USIB action on October 5.

The following questions are offered as general guidelines and could be re-worked into a more precise terms of reference or used as the basis for an ONE draft estimate. We believe that oral contributions are preferable, to save time, so that ONE may quickly draft the basic working paper. The outline is not as formidable as it looks, because these questions have been discussed before, and this project involves more an updating of agreed positions than exploration of new problems.

1. How do Hanoi and Peiping view present trends in SVN and Laos? What is their position on maintaining and intensifying the VC effort or making any aggressive move in Laos? How are they trying to play Laos, with respect to a conference or intensified military action at any point? (All the above in the absence of any new move by us).

2. What, after the Tonkin Gulf episodes, is Communist China's view of the US threat to North Vietnam and its own relationship to Hanoi? What is Peiping's view of US intentions and likely action? What is the extent of Sino-North Vietnamese military cooperation and how and under what circumstances is it likely to increase? For what contingencies and for what action does Peiping seem now to be preparing, and under what circumstances would it probably decide to take further action to strengthen its warnings that "aggression against North Vietnam means aggression against China?"

3. What might trigger a Hanoi-Peiping decision to abandon the 1954 Geneva Accords and send troops into South Vietnam?

4. Do the North Vietnamese desire the presence of Chinese forces in North Vietnam? If so, under what circumstances? Is there any evidence of a difference of view between Hanoi and Peiping as to what assistance the Chinese should provide?

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5. Are they likely to seek negotiations? Under what circumstances? What terms? Any possibility of Hanoi-Peiping disagreement over timing?

6. What are Soviet views of the situation? How explain recent criticism of both US and Peiping and hints of possible interest in a negotiated settlement even under UN auspices? Can Moscow exert a moderating influence on Hanoi?

How would Hanoi, Peiping, and Moscow react to:

1. Resumption of DeSoto patrols with or without 34A maritime operations

a. If the North Vietnamese go after the destroyers and we retaliate again with air strikes, what would be the likely communist reaction? Would it depend on the targets and/or intensity of the retaliation?

2. Resumption of 34A, particularly maritime operations.

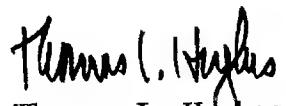
3. Air action and/or ground operations against infiltration-associated targets in the Lao panhandle.

4. A gradual and systematic pattern of US/GVN attacks against infiltration and military-related targets in the DRV, combined with directly communicated private warnings of our objectives and limited intent.

a. Are the communists likely to feel compelled to take some action to disrupt such a program in the early stages and to force our hand? What actions might they take? What actions might they take just to prepare for this contingency?

b. How would the communists react to continued prosecution of the program?

We should much appreciate your authorizing this SNIE.


Thomas L. Hughes

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